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Revisiting Partition in Tanvir Mokammel's Films in the Light of Geo-Cultural Identity Theory

Muhammad Ullah 

Department of Philosophy, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Corresponding Author: Muhammad Ullah, Email: muhammad@juniv.edu

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Abstract

The partition of 1947 is the most tragic and remarkable incident in the history of modern South Asia in creating new political identities. It separated peoples of common ethno-cultural and religious origins with artificial political borderlines imposed on their historical homelands that transformed the traditional socio-political arrangement of this region into a regional international nation-state system. Consequently, two independent states, India and Pakistan, came into being as a result of partition based on the two-nation theory. Millions of the inhabitants had to be displaced and migrated from their birth lands. In the changed circumstances, the natural identity of the individual by birth has been replaced by the political identity of the state. Due to these changes, many people remain stateless and become refugees. It appears as an unending source of crisis in this region such as identity and citizenship crises, communal politics, linguistic and cultural conflicts, communal riots, force-displacement, border killings, etc. These issues are well addressed in the three partition films - *Chitra Nadir Pare (Quiet Flows the River Chitra)*, *Swapnabhumi (The Promised Land)* and *Seemantorekha (The Borderline)* produced by Tanvir Mokammel, an internationally acclaimed auteur filmmaker in Bangladesh. His deep insight into post-partition impact has been reflected in these films. How a filmmaker perceives partition is revisited and analyzed in this paper by an idea of contemporary political philosophy known as 'geo-cultural identity theory'.

Keywords: South Asia, partition, geo-cultural identity theory, Tanvir Mokammel films

Introduction

The partition of 1947 is a unique political event in the world that has been badly experienced by the people of the Indian subcontinent. It caused bloody massacres, initiated clashes between communities, and tremble on the ground of the eternal human bonding of the people of the region. Even, it still instigates communal tension. It divides historic India into two modern states, namely India and Pakistan in the name of two nation-theory accompanied by the concept of the nation-state, as "the contemporary sovereign state system is predicated on the idea of the nation-state, in which each nation

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of people has its own state in their homeland” (Jones 5). Though this theoretical application was inappropriate to the Indian context because of its multi-ethnic populaces with multi-religious identities and practices. Their faiths and ethnicities crisscross and that makes the communities more diverse and inclusive. The existence of a populace of multi-religious faiths with a single ethnicity or a populace of multi-ethnicities with single religious faith is an undeniable reality of this region. For example, the Bengali people both in Bangladesh and in West Bengal are of different religious faiths and they are known as Hindus, Muslims, Christians, etc. Similarly, the Hindu religious people may have many different ethnic origins like Bengali, Panjabi, Bihari, Tamil, etc. This is true for Christians and Muslims also. So, a Hindu or a Muslim cannot be separated on the basis of religious identity. If it happens, then other identities are denied. India, as a land of multi-ethnicities, multi-cultures and multi-religions, owns people of multiple identities as in the “Indian subcontinent multiculturalism has been a historical reality for centuries” (Hood 268). Despite having the same geographic and cultural roots people belong to a plurality of diversified ethnic, linguistic, and religious affinities. This plurality is neither delimited by a singular identity nor by a singular nationality linked with a territorial borderline. The notions of nationality and religious identity are not the same and identical. Religion is neither nationality nor ethnicity. Taking any political decision on the assumption that these are identical is itself contradictory. Partition happened by treating religious identity as nationality and this is the foundation of the two-nation theory.

Based on this theoretical presupposition, the political decision of “making of separate homelands for Hindus and Muslims” (Ghoshal 4), i.e., Pakistan would be the land of Majority-Muslims and India would be the land of Majority-Hindus, was taken and the division got justification. Due to this decision, people of the same soil have been separated from each other and classified with a new identity created by partition. Millions of people had to leave their land either by choice or by force for an unseen home in an imagined homeland. Across the way to the uncertain new home, many people have been massacred, killed, and lost their life and resource by being victims of fierce riots. That was happening in different places in Panjab, Bihar, and Bengal between the Hindus and the Muslims. People lost their lives and lands and become refugees. They had to accept a new life with a new political system. An intense urge for independent India from British rule thus resulted in the division. Colonialism has been replaced by the concept of modern statehood that claims sovereignty and the notion of sovereignty prioritizes statehood over individual identity. Though, such state identity dominates the traditional neighborhood and mutual relationships.

With the new political system, perhaps relatively, many people had benefited but at the cost of what? That cannot be measured but can be understood by the post-partition impact. A post-partition phenomenon is a sharp political boundary that was drawn between the two new states India and Pakistan. That divides peoples and territories, families, relatives, neighbors, religions, and ethnicities. It divides Bengal and Panjab both tangibly with barbed wire and intangibly with psychic disunity: “The creation of a border turned neighbours into migrants, while some of them became refugees and were later seen by the nation-state as dubious citizens” (Ghoshal 35). It was such an event where people of the same land who altogether fought against the British era, were then at war against each other. Despite happening such a disastrous human calamity, partition gets a kind of justification as if it is compensated by the two independent states characterized by the concept of sovereign statehood.

In reality, its fatal theoretical position had been disproved when East Pakistan became Independent Bangladesh through a historic liberation war in 1971. Thus, so-

called religious nationality was replaced with Bengali ethnic and linguistic identity called 'Bengali nationalism' (Ghoshal 1). The most unfortunate thing about partition is that its horrific impact on the people of this region is long-standing. Many things are yet unsettled and unresolved. The crisis of statelessness, identity, and citizenship, the rights and the recognition of the land, language, and culture, barbed wire, and border killing are severe concerns as humanitarian issues that are the by-product of partition. Many of the people in these three countries India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are still suffering from the present struggle bearing with historic trauma.



Fig. 1. The poster of Chitra Nadir Pare

In the continuum of more than seventy years, how the partition keeps its chain effect on the people of the region is represented in an artistic way by Tanvir Mokammel, an internationally acclaimed auteur filmmaker in Bangladesh. Three of his films made on partition - *Chitra Nadir Pare* (*Quiet Flows the River Chitra*), *Swapnabhumi* (*The Promised Land*) and *Seemantorekha* (*The Borderline*). *Chitra Nadir Pare* (*Quiet Flows the River Chitra*), is a feature film produced in 1999 where he depicts the trauma and agony of leaving one's own birthland. As Mukherjee cites filmmaker's comment: "Their anxious faces perhaps left a strong impression on my young, tender mind. When I was just a student of class six- I mean around the age of 11- I decided to make a film on the miseries of the Hindus in East Bengal and decided to title the film *Chitra Nadir Pare*" (6). As shown in Fig. 1, the film shows the face of Minoti in a Mid Shot that implies the disruption of communal harmonious relationship between the two communities. Minoti and Badal, children of two neighboring Hindu and Muslim families grown up altogether with joy and love. But, as a post partition impact the riot spreads and vandalized this traditional spontaneous relationship. Minoti with her aunty had to leave East-Bengal and migrated to India.

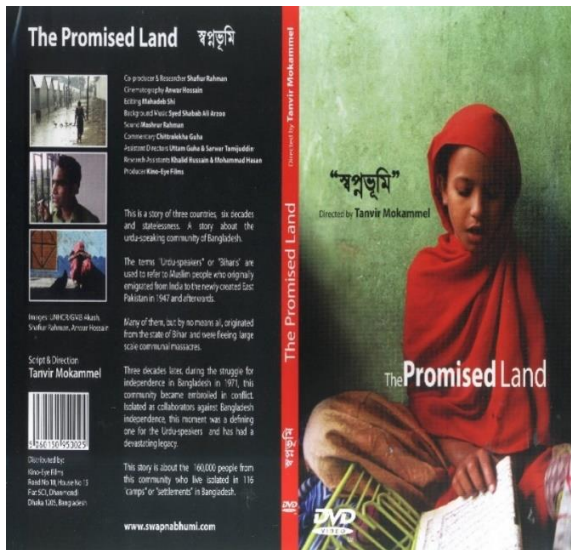


Fig. 2. The poster of *Swapnabhumi*

Swapnabhumi (The Promised Land) is a documentary film produced in 2007 on the Urdu-speaking Bihari Muslim residing in Bangladesh who left Bihar for East Pakistan during the partition with the hope of a dreamland. After twenty-three years of partition with the breakdown of Pakistan, these people become stateless and known as refugees or stranded Pakistani in Bangladesh. How their disillusioned life without citizenship is going on has been passionately presented in this film. In Fig. 2, the Bihari children who born in Bangladesh dream for this country. Their hope and future are tied with this birthland. Their urge to be recognized as Bangladeshi.



Fig. 3. Title Card of *Seemantorekha*

Seemantorekha (The Borderline) is a documentary film produced in 2017 on the impact of the Partition of Bengal. Due to this, many Bengali Hindu people left Bengal and settled in different places in India including West Bengal. The borderline with the barbed wire between the two Bengals appears as a permanent and visible symbol of disunity among the people of this region. How these people are now in changed circumstances has been understood with the cinematic lens. Tanvir Mokammel searches for answers to the questions on the inevitability of the partition that costs sufferings in the lives of millions of people described by him as a human catastrophe. “Tanvir examines various ramifications of displacement, such as the nostalgia that urges one to seek to rediscover the past, the pain associated with the permanent sundering of families

and friends, the tragic irony of being a refugee in what is, at least perceptibly, one's own country, and the cultural ties that would bridge the political divide" (Hood 376). This human catastrophe is symbolically expressed on the title card of *Seemantorekha*. Fig.3 shows that the red colored '1947' is a symbol of bloody massacre that happened due to partition and the barbed wire between 19 and 47 is a sign of that partition.

The impact of partition presented in the films might be well explained by the concept of *Geo-Cultural Identity*. It is a newly advanced theory in the field of contemporary political philosophy that recognizes people's bonding with their geographic and cultural roots. It assumes that any state should be built up or any state policy should be taken to retain one's geographic identity along with their cultural rights. It advocates for rights and justice related to land, language, and culture placing the individual self in a center position (Ullah 174). This theory upholds the identity of selfhood and considers statelessness, refugee, and related issues on that ground. In light of this theory, Tanvir Mokammel's above-mentioned partition films are well-grounded to raise the issues of the basic human rights that are violated by the partition phenomena.

Partition of 1947: Ground, Cause and Impact

There are multiple narratives about the causes and grounds of the partition of 1947. All of these indicate one thing in common which is communal tension between Hindus and Muslims that leads to communal violence. One narrative is that this condition was created for gaining vested political interest. Thus, communal tension was driven to be transformed into violence. It became familiar as a minority-majority conflict where Hindus are the majority and Muslims are the minority. This majority-minority connotation was tactfully created and got supreme importance among politicians. Bandyopadhyay argues: "[T]he political purpose of the partition was to resolve the problems of the minorities is one standpoint that has so far been regarded as the most prevailing, people are convinced to accept, though it only ended up creating new minorities" (40). Ultimately, this position lost its ground for not being able to resolve the minority problems. Another narrative comes with a major allegation – the conflict of desire between the leaders of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League regarding the prime position of the then would-be independent state: "A kind of politicians needed the partition so that there would be two states, two seats of power, two prime ministers, two cabinets. For that partition happened" (*Seemantorekha*, 2:18:58-2:19:10). To resolve this ambitious clash, two states were necessary and it was possible only by dividing one country into two. A territorial demarcation line, as well as a sense of adherence of the people to those divided parts, was required. Jones states,

...the authorities decided to draw new boundaries to divide up the land between these groups. The plan to partition India assumed that the categories "Hindu" and "Muslim" were stable, fixed identities that fundamentally defined the group membership of individuals. Once that assumption was made, the task of drawing new boundaries was relatively simple. (1-2)

But it was impossible for the people to accept a division of a country they were connected to by birth, fought for its independence, and became a part of its history. So, a new sense of adherence was required to give a feeling of belongingness to a new territory. Thus, an imagined territory named Pakistan as a Muslim state, which did not refer to any place was created by virtue of religious sentiment that treats religious community as a nation: "When the British Raj was dismantled, the frontiers of the new states were drawn mainly along the lines of religion. In the making of Pakistan religion appears to have been the determinant of nationality" (Jalal 1). The two-nation theory was based on this notion.

Applying this theory to two major religious communities – Hindu and Muslim partition happened. As if, there were no other religions in India. If the communal violence between the majority and minority is considered as the condition, then ‘majority-minority’ terms are required for further clarification. There are many groups of other ethnicities and religious beliefs who are also referred to as minorities other than Muslims in India. In this respect, both Hindus and Muslims were supposed to be considered the majority. Even, in a hierarchic order of the groups in respect of number, except the group at the bottom, all the rest are the majority and vice versa.

Besides, the terms majority and minority are very relative to the bounded place which cannot be universalized. The same population who are the majority in one place may be a minority in other places. So, transforming two majorities into a majority-minority issue and identifying them as nations indicates a purposeful categorization. As if, the necessity of the two states precedes the assumption of two nations. Jones shows how the categorization of “Hindu” and “Muslim” made the task of drawing new boundaries easy, placing a majority of one group on one side and members of the other group on the other” (1–2). So, partition happened by the effort of ‘the high politics’ referred to the British, the Congress, and the Muslim that led to the creation of Pakistan as Gilmartin cites, “Never before in South Asian history, did so few divide so many . . .” (1069).

Whatever the causes of the partition are, its aftermath is devastating for that time, for now and for the future as Ghosal argues,

The Partition of India created more problems than it actually solved. . . . What is ironic is that even seventy-five years after Indian independence, such layered issues of contradictions and conflicts derived from the Partition of 1947 have continued and border disputes have remained unresolved. . . . The aftermath of Partition not only affected geo-physical entities but permanently changed the psychological and cultural matrix of both India and Pakistan. (1-3)

Partition mercilessly damaged the life of the people, spread violence, instigated aggression and flowed the bloodshed.

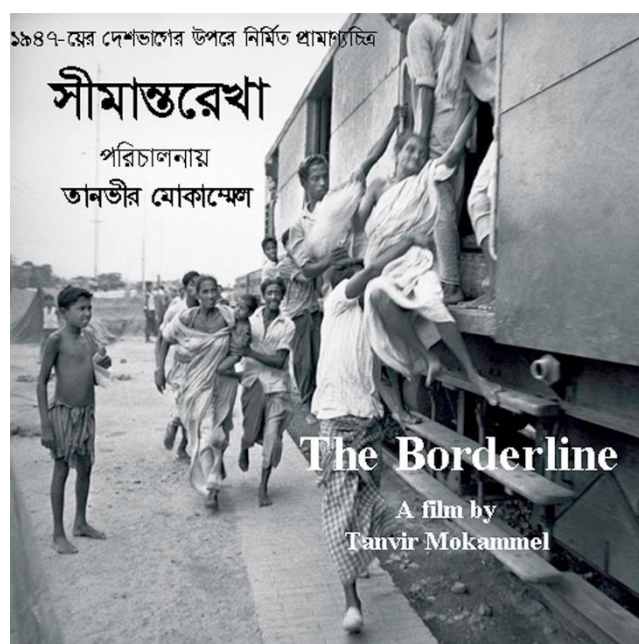


Fig. 4. The poster of Seemantorekha

Fig. 4 shows the poster of *Seemantorekha* that is a real footage of a partition train leaving the platform. The distressed, fearful people are running to get the train to migrate other country for saving their life. Partition happened and left so many issues unsolved. The sufferings and human catastrophe cannot be compensated by so-called independence. Through partition, two independent modern states were born. At the same time, so many people have been stateless in many forms. The issues of enclaves sustained for seventy years. Geographically, I would say "a unified India" has been divided through it. It separated peoples, groups and individuals from each other. It changes the shared Indian identity, creates new border, and makes people stand against themselves. This changed circumstances caused some issues contrary to the natural life pattern of the people of the region.

The new concept of state along with its appearance brings a new crisis of statelessness that makes some people citizen and some other refugees. A new political identity had to be adopted that compelled many, who are the sons of the same soil, to think that they are not citizens, they are refugees. A new state boundary was drawn with barbed wire which has been a source for extra judicial border killing. New issues regarding the rights of language and culture became the prime concern for some despite being within the same state. Many have been uprooted from their birth land and have been settled in different places unknown to them. The question is: how these feelings and the agony of leaving birth land could be compensated?

Partition in Tanvir Mokammel's Films

All these issues mentioned are revisited in three films of Tanvir Mokammel. Tanvir Mokammel was born after 1947 and did not have direct experience of partition. But its impact deeply affects his sensitive mind that is inquisitive to investigate more about partition. His personal emotions and perceptions regarding 1947 partition is expressed in an interview:

On the emotional plane, the Partition of 1947 deeply saddens me. When I look back at the series of tragic events which cause the Partition, I feel melancholic. In my conscious socio-political self, I always look at the Partition as a historical mistake. A combination of chance events, flawed decisions and missed opportunities, compounded more by some overambitious and megalomaniac self-seeking leaders. But that is what history has always been about. Human history is full of such colossal mistakes and incorrigible missed opportunities. (431)

Similarly, in an interview, Mokammel was asked what sorts of images of partition he sees when he closes his eyes. He replied:

To see the images of the Partition I don't have to close my eyes. As a filmmaker, and as I have made more than one film on the Partition of 1947, the fiction "*Quite Flows the River Chitra*" [*Chitra Nadir Pare*] and recently the "*The Borderline*" [*Seemantorekha*], I had to deal a lot with the living images of the Partition footages. Those melancholic faces, the tumultuous events, the cruel riots, the endless trails of refugees, all prop up in my mind whenever the word Partition is uttered. And they all come as images. Some of which I have shot myself for my own films or some I have seen as archival footages. (431)

In the same interview, he was asked why partition has marked such a strong impression in his psyche.

In his three films he represents sensitive sign of human suffering from the perspective of a film maker and shows how partition changed the people's life and pattern of relationship. He raises questions: "Was it really necessary to divide India?"

Was it inevitable to divide Bengal as well? Especially if we keep in mind the sufferings it brought in the lives of the millions of people. Was 1947 an inevitability of history? Or was it an aberration of history?" (*Seemantorekha* 4:25-4:50). All these questions have much implications in contemporary life leading to affect connecting forthcoming days. The selected major issues that require serious considerations are being addressed here.

Fallacy of Partition and Its Prime Actors

Tanvir Mokammel searches the causes of partition and finds out the political ambitions of the then leaders, especially that of Mohammad Ali Jinnah who played a decisive role by collaborating with the British to cause India divided. Mokammel thinks that Jinnah's intransigence and conspiracies by Winston Churchill and other conservative politicians from London, made the creation of Pakistan inevitable. He further points out that Jinnah's *Two Nation Theory* was a total fallacy as it completely misunderstood, and deliberately misplaced, the concept and meaning of the terms *nation* and *community*. Nation and community are not same. They never were. This was proven by the Bengalee nation's breaking up with the communal state of Pakistan and formation of an independent secular state of Bangladesh in 1971 (*Seemantorekha* 15:00-15:50).

Traumatizing Memory of Leaving Birthland

Tanvir Mokammel depicted post-partition forced migration of the Hindu families from East Bengal. The deeper pathetic feelings of leaving one's own birthland is represented vividly. In his first feature film *Chitra Nadir Pare* the dilemma of a person for not to migrate from the birthland in which they have been living for centuries is portrayed. The challenges that had to face by the millions of Hindu families of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) who left their home is characterized. The character of an eccentric lawyer Shashikanta Sengupta who stubbornly refuses to leave his motherland is one of the instances. As Shashikant's dialogue "Shashikanta would not go anywhere. One walks firmly on One's forefather's land" (4:05-4:17) implies the inseparable bonding with his place. He did not migrate and finally died by a heart attack. Tanvir Mokammel shows how the sense of belongingness with one's homeland is so naturally bounded.

In the documentary film *Seemantorekha*, this relationship with left land and yearnings for getting it closer is repeatedly uttered in different scene. "Over a shot of many people on top of a steep river bank, a wide river on left of the frame and lush fields on the right, Tanvir speaks of the profound impulse among the people of the two Bengals to be closer. There are already certain days of the year on which they do come close. During the great Hindu festival, Durga Puja, people come to both banks of the Ichamati river . . . (There) A women fuses the immersion ritual with her own experience, saying that she always wanted to go to the other side of the river but was never able to, but if she could it would be the best things in her life"(Hood 414). In her own speech, "Whenever I come near the river, looking at the other side of the river, I make obeisance. One day a BSF member asked me; 'Mother, why do you make obeisance to that side?'. I told him: 'That is my birthplace'. You cannot forget your birthplace" (*Seemantorekha* (2:07:50-2:08:20). Pabitra Sarkar, a renowned scholar and author of books, who left East Bengal when he was eleven-year-old expresses the universal feeling of leaving own's land: "That pain remains there. Even if your country changes, your birthplace does not change. My birthplace is the same and until my death, I will carry that with me" (*Seemantorekha* 2:18:20-2:18:32). These all-heartfelt expressions of the diasporic people are not just normal speech or conversation, rather the agony of the separation from such a root that is very fundamental to human existence. This past appeals to the

contemporary mind to be reflective on what should not be politicized at the cost of life and living land.

Statelessness, Identity and Citizenship

The concern of statelessness, identity and citizenship is a result of partition that are empathically addressed in both two documentary films *Seemantorekha* and *Swapnabhumi*. In *Swapnabhumi*, the identity and citizenship issue of Urdu-speaking Bihari Muslims are brought into light who have been deceived for twice. First, in 1947 when they left Bihar with the dream of heavenly life and set out to an imagined land East Pakistan that lasted only for twenty-three years. Secondly, after the breaking-down of Pakistan, as they were thought to be the collaborators of Pakistani junta for their linguistic similarities and affinities during the liberation war, they remain unrecognized as Bangladeshi. Until 2008, they did not have citizenship right. They were known as refugees or stranded Pakistanis and live in refugee camps. This film was produced in 2007. How their life was going on being devoid of state identity is revealed. Tanvir Mokammel raised the issues and tried to find the answer of these fundamental questions in *Swapnabhumi*, "Will they ever find their promised land?" If these questions remain unanswered many other questions, then arise: Who are they? What is their identity? Are they Bihari? Are they Pakistani? Are they Bangladeshi?

After the independence of Bangladesh, they were supposed to be repatriated to Pakistan by a tripartite agreement signed by India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in April 1974. In the midst of the process, it is stopped and procrastinated because of the new citizenship act of Pakistan in 1978. Tanvir Mokammel states, due to these internal problems of Pakistan, rest of the Biharis are still languishing their life in the camps of Bangladesh under squalid living condition. Sohel Akter, a Bangladeshi born Bihari's concern for the state recognition is expressed:

We have lived in Bangladesh for thirty-six years. Kids born in these camps are now themselves parents of children, became fathers and mothers. Generations lost out totally. The present one is left with nothing. They are completely destitute. The biggest tragedy is, Pakistan says, we are not Pakistani. Bangladesh doesn't recognize us, even the UNHCR doesn't recognize us as refugees. So my question is, are we the citizens of a Utopia? (*Swapnabhumi* 1:16:04-1:16:38)

The answer of the questions on the citizenship status of the Biharis was given by Pia Prytz Phiri, Representative of UNHCR in Bangladesh. She states:

The Biharis are not refugee. They have been in Bangladesh for a very long time. So they are habitual residents of this territory. The question in regard to the Biharis is a question of whether or not they are citizens? If you look at the constitution and the relevant citizenship act, as well as, the milestone judgment of 2003, I would say that the Biharis are Bangladeshi citizens. What is necessary I think is for the government to act now in practice, and to ensure, that the national administration and global organizations, schools, hospitals, NGOs, UN sister agencies, all understand that the Biharis are part of the Bangladeshi population. They are Urdu speakers. They are not Bengalee. But they are Bangladeshi. (*Swapnabhumi* 1:16:39-1:17:32)

The film was released in 2007 and on the appeal for citizenship by the Biharis in 2008, the Supreme Court ordered the Bangladesh Election Commission to register the Biharis as voters and to issue their national identity cards as citizens. The 2008 ruling was a landmark court decision, which after thirty seven years of founding Bangladesh as an independent state, ended the statelessness of the Biharis (Hussain). Indeed, the film played a vital role.

Language, Culture and Education

Due to the partition the language, culture and the education of the displaced people in both sides are in crisis. In the documentary film *Seemantorekha* Tanvir Mokammel finds in Nainital Bengali refugee's concern over medium of education and the extinction of language and culture:

We simply don't have the Bengali language here. We're forced to learn the state language Hindi. In schools, in offices, only that language works." "After one or two generations, our language or culture will become extinct. What is the identity of a person? His nation, his language, his culture. But where is my language? Where is my culture? Who am I? I cannot express that. (*Seemantorekha* 40:30-40:56)

Similar concerns for the Bengali in Assam are also received by Tanvir Mokammel. Tanvir Mokammel notices that the Assamese language is the medium of education. Bengalee children are learning Assamese. There is a Bengali medium school but the number of students has reduced. All are learning Assamese now. An interviewee in Barak valley of Assam who was active 1961 language movement in narrates:

They passed the law that the Assamese will be the only official language of the state. Official works, education, will be in Assamese. No other language will be there except English. However, we couldn't succeed enough. Our only success was in the Barak valley where Bengali language in official works and education was established. In the rest of Assam, it wasn't the case. (*Seemantorekha* 2:02:12-2:02:40)

In the film *Swapnabhumi*, he shows that Biharis do not have any access to education in their mother tongue Urdu, they receive their education in Bengali language he states: "Whether they study in small or big schools the Bihari children mostly study in Bangla. With this medium of education, the tendency to become a Bengalee is increasing too. During our research, a Bihari youth asked us: 'Tell me which scripture should I recite to become a Bengalee?'" (*Swapnabhumi* 1:06:38- 1:07:01). Both in India and Bangladesh, the recognition of the language of displaced, migrated people should be considered by the state for the sake of protection of people's right to language and culture. For, those people are the innocent victim of the partition-circumstances and not the participant of that event. When the film unit visits a school a Bihari children was reciting a Bengali poem depicting rural Bengal to whom they are not connected. Urdu speaking students share their experiences that Bengali students doesn't want to mingle with them. Tanvir Mokammel states this type of social interaction is psychologically harmful and cannot be acceptable. He wants to know, "Is language such a barrier among the people of this Sub-Continent?" Tanvir Mokammel states; "Language is not only a medium of communication. It is also a prime source of culture and inculcates the sense of patriotism. When the Urdu-speaking little schoolgirl recited a Bangla poem and invited us to her village home in rural Bengal, the irony of history was all too clear in that poem! Simply because a Bihari girl has no chance to have any home in a village in Bangladesh!" (*Swapnabhumi* 1:06:15-1:06:36). Such an enriched Urdu language should not be considered as a language of collaborators of Pakistani. By its own virtue any language should be preserved, promoted, and practiced. Besides, the Urdu-speaking Bangladeshi Bihari children should have the opportunity to take education in mother language and to be identified as Bangladeshi with their own distinct language and culture. As it is a post-partition impact, both three countries, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have tripartite responsibility to these issues.

Irony of Political Identity Within State

The irony of the state created by partition is that it changes a person's state identity who never demanded it. Who never have given any consent and never moved anywhere to be settled down but he discovered himself with a new identity in a new circumstance. An interesting instance of ironic state-identity was mentioned by Dr. Sazal Nag in *Seemantorekha*;

My granddad told me, "What is this Partition? I don't understand Partition. I lived in British India. So to me, my country was Moulvibazar. I didn't know whether I'm in Bengal or in Pakistan. For me it was Moulvibazar. Suddenly I was told that Partition has occurred and I have become a Pakistani. My granddad said, 'I didn't even go out of my home but I became a Pakistani.' In 1971 he was there, he didn't cross the border. He would come to visit but never migrated. He said 'in the same Moulvibazar I became a Bangladeshi. I didn't even come out of my village but I became an Indian, then a Pakistani and then a Bangladeshi.' Nationhood changed around him but he didn't come out of his village. But his nationality got changed. (*Seemantorekha* 2:00:08-2:00:56)

It shows that the advent of modern state system in India is a post partition impact and unrelated to the common people's consent upon which it was supposed to be established. So, a state was thus established and gave a new political identity to the people who did not wish for it. How is it to bear such an imposed identity?

Question of Justification and the Ethical Ground of Partition

As the result of the partition three independent modern states were born. Is that any permanent solution? Are the people happy? When any uncalled-for incident happens against the minority community in any of the states, even in suffering, they tend to remain silent. Can be a permanent human situation to accept? Besides, was the Partition ethical? Those who accepted Partition as a solution, was that also an eternally final solution even for them? The life of a community or people is not political only. There are so many other aspects and considerations in life. What about those socio-cultural issues? Debesh Roy, a renowned novelist from West Bengal, rightly points out in: "So, a question remained unresolved in the life of the Bengalees. That these two communities, the Hindus and the Muslims, who had been living for such a long time with their own dynamics, excitement, and anxiety, didn't have any social or cultural solution but had a political solution" (*Seemantorekha* 1:35:37-1:36:05). With the consideration of so-called religious minority and majority tension, other significant factors have been skipped and partition has become an unended, unfinished project. It is a kind of denial of essence of a community who lived together with peace and harmony since the time immemorial. It cannot be justified on any ground because there is no ethical support in favor of that devastating bifurcation.

Borderline with Barbed Wire

Partition is alive and functional with its barbed wires along the border line between the states of India and Bangladesh. Tanvir Mokammel poignantly raises questions about this very division of Bengal and also the validity of the existence of this borderline. He asks: "Today it may be asked whether construction of this boundary wall was fair? Was there any other alternative? After all these years it can be explored how much proximity is truly possible between these two communities across the wall" (*Seemantorekha* 13:36-13:56). These questions are exquisite to be taken seriously regarding the sensitivity of human bonding, miseries of the divided communities and for the lack of moral justification behind this inhuman borderline. To find out the

alternatives, state level leaders, policy makers and civil society have responsibility to explore the ways to reunite the communities overcoming the barriers of the wall.

Tanvir Mokammel's questions are still so valid that if we can find the right answers some very intricate historical problems of this Sub-Continent might be resolved. The questions he asked are:

What is this borderline? Is it only a barbed wire? Or is it the mere borderline between two sovereign states of India and Bangladesh? Or is it a borderline that divides the Hindus and the Muslims? Or is it the demarcation line of the behavioral differences between the East and West Bengal's Bengalees? Or is there any invisible borderline of disunity within our hearts which does not allow us to mingle together? (*Seemantorekha* 14:25-14:55).

He asks further: "Shall this borderline remain as something permanent in the history of Bengal?" (*Seemantorekha* 2:20:10-2:20:17). The answer to these above-mentioned ontological questions regarding this borderline might be found in philosophical, psychological, historical, and cultural understanding of social solidarity that encircled every member of the community. In fact, it necessitates to discover regional vernacular values of south Asian people that could be applied in state matters. That value has been expressed by the film maker as south Asian consciousness.

Fierce Border Killing at the Indo-Bangladesh Border

In *Seemantorekha* the scene of tragic border killings at the Indo-Bangla border have been focused. The killing of poor Bangladeshi people in the border is quite frequent. "On the Bangladesh border, the Indian Border Security Forces kill, on average, 150 Bangladeshis per year. These are not militants but rather farmers, smugglers and in 2011 even a 15-year-old girl named Felani whose clothing got stuck in the barbed wire" (Jones 5). Tanvir Mokammel describes:

Felani's poor family in Rangpur is such an example. The family went to India for work. They didn't have the means to make passport or visa. Felani was returning with her father by crossing the barbed fence. The date of her marriage was only two days away. Poor Felani's dress got stuck up in the barbed wire. Felani was shot by a member of BSF and she died there. (*Seemantorekha* 1:08:48-1:09:20)

This is one of the most tragic post partition incidents that violated all the standards of humanity by killing the unarmed, poor little Bangladeshi girl. How this non-stop judiciary killing of people can be justified by a state? Is this borderline so superior then the human being whose rights and security are supposed to be protected by the state?



Fig. 5. Dead body of Felani hung in barbed fence of border

Fig. 5 shows the footage of Felani's lifeless dead body hung entangled in the wires after shooting by BSF in India-Bangladesh border. Felani's relatives live in that part of India named as Cooch Behar a district in West Bengal from where she was returning with her father. How cruel the border line is! Primarily it divided the families and relatives mercilessly and secondly the effort to meet with relatives is being prevented by the killing. Was this borderline wanted by those divided families? If not, then for whom this border is? That horrible border with all its cruel characters remains unchanged. This picture as the paradox of the partition history vehemently justifies the question whether construction of this boundary wall was fair?

Divided Psyche: The Politics of Communal Ideologies

Through the Partition, the politics of communal ideologies takes its roots to the psyche of the public, national political supporters and leaders in all three countries. In *Chitra Nadir Pare*, Tanvir Mokammel shows one instance how the children's mind was forming with communal consciousness:

CNP, representing a nation at the crossroads, traces the process of (sub)conscious communal identity formation. Here Tanvir Mokammel makes strategic use of children's games, which, as the last conversation Minu has with Salma before she lives Narail reveals, were never wholly innocent:

Salma: You know, in our childhood days, Najma and I would tease you and Bidyut on the sly over something.

Minu: About what?...

Salma: You won't laugh, right? We'd think black ants are better than red ants because they don't bite. So were sure that the black ones must be Muslims and the red ones, Hindus. How childish we were!

Minu: (With a sigh). Perhaps we still are . . . (*Chitra Nadir Pare* 1:38:06-1:38:39; Mukherjee 127)

The harmonious relationship between Hindu and Muslim were thus contaminated by communal politics that was implanted even among the psyche of the children. These communal ideologies developed during partition is still forceful in the subcontinent that should be diminished and replaced by harmonious coexistence.

A Question of Politics Over Humanity: What Would Prevail?

After dividing this border line, people were displaced from their homeland from both of two wings of Bengal. It was not at all any easy cross over for them. They had to lose their home and hearth and relatives were killed or lost. But the states remained alive and kicking. When a state becomes alive at the cost of human suffering and agonies then the question arises whether that statehood is ethically necessary at all. Tanvir Mokammel points out to a very significant issue which is very much a contemporary concern for the whole civilized world, whether state is more important? Or humanity? He states:

Those who had to leave their home know how painful it can be. Those people who had to leave their motherland due to the Partition, due to this borderline who became permanently alienated from their birthplace, that borderline may serve some purpose for statehood. But for humanity, this borderline shall remain as a catastrophe in Bengal's history. (*Seemantorekha* 2:20:17-2:20:40)

Partition suppressed humanity and served the vested interest of political actors. Bengal has been divided and the borderline has been set up without considering the suffering of the people concerned. For the sake of humanity, reevaluation of partition politics is expected to be modified according to people's rights and demands.

Reunion of Bengal: Hope or Unrealistic Return?

Any system developed by human beings is not something divine and eternal. Even if some event happens in some particular juncture of history, it is not necessary that it has to remain as unchangeable for eternity. Decisions or execution of those decisions can be changed or modified for the greater need of humanity. If any such thing remains whose validity and ethical acceptability is in question that problem can definitely be addressed, changed and updated. In the history of civilization, it has been proven again and again that nothing is permanent. After trying various political systems of trial and error, the world is in a particular new order now. Among these transformations, so many forms had appeared in modern history which later have been gradually modified according to the demand of the people. Tanvir Mokammel states: "Some European nations once fought wars with each other even for one hundred years. But today they are living peacefully side by side. Visa has become extinct for the Europeans to travel within Europe" (*Seemantorekha* 2:20:50-2:21:06). So, Tanvir Mokammel raised question: "Will the people of this Sub-Continent ever, by shedding off their religious and communal disunity, be united again with a common South Asian consciousness to which they belonged to for thousands of years?" (*Seemantorekha* 2:21:07-2:21:22). No fight was happened between two Bengals; no war was between them. The riots which took place were instigated by the political agenda of some specific political or economic groups. Common Bengalee people did never consciously participate in those riots. Thus, the possibility of an amicable solution between the two Bengals seems much more plausible than it was in Europe. What is required is a philosophical and theoretical background that need to be developed to construct new model for the solution of the regional political problems. To address the above-mentioned issues, I assume the idea of geo-cultural identity may be incorporated into political worldview as well as in state policy.

Geo-Cultural Identity Theory

In the field of contemporary political philosophy, the concept of Geo-Cultural Identity is a new discovery. It is coined and theorized by Bangladeshi political philosopher Md. Munir Hossain Talukder. In the paper "In Defence of Geo-Cultural Identity: An Argument Against Kymlicka's View of Multiculturalism and Minority Rights," he first used the term 'geo-cultural' identity (Talukder 166). The core of this idea is explained by Jada Watson, as an individual's identity that is expressed through both his or her cultural membership and geographic affiliation (Watson 2017). Watson further clarifies this in following words; "Talukder defines cultural identity as an individual's language, dress, food, festivals, norms, values, and geographic identity as his/her living land" (Watson 34–35). A person's identity thus embraces both the geographic landscape as well as the cultural traits and values. The essence of personhood can be explained by the terms 'sense of self' and 'sense of place', coined by Thomas Solomon, to which a person belongs. Watson states, "According to Thomas Solomon, the connection between an individual's 'sense of self' and 'sense of place' is so intimately connected that it should be described as a 'sense of place-self'" (Watson 2). This 'sense of place-self' indicates the inseparable bonding of land and person. An identity of individual person based on this selfhood is naturally inherited that cannot be denied by the identity that is artificially constructed by the group-consideration of politics within modern state that recognize some 'citizens' and other 'stateless'. Stateless people are denied their selfhood when their geographic identity is denied. On the other hand, citizens within a state may be denied their selfhood when they are treated not on the ground of the values of self-hood but on religious, cultural, or ethnic consideration that makes some majorities and some minorities. As community is comprised with the

collection of individual self is expected to be treated on the ground of the values of selfhood and must not be treated and affected as minority or majority based on the number of people: "Geo-Cultural Identity is a philosophical position to view people not from the point of religion, caste, culture, and ethnicity but from the perspective of selfhood" (Ullah 175). This theoretical consideration diminishes the sense of the majority-minority narrative and perceives an individual self just as a part of the collection of selves living in the society mutually respectful to each other, though differ from another, in respect of habit, livelihood, and choices.

It necessitates a kind of self-realization to understand human beings on the ground of humanness to uphold the individual human right. In a society, multiple communities live with plural affiliations in many categories that do not negate one's identity. This theory affirms multiple identities and incorporates the idea of 'plural affiliations' supported by Amartya Sen.

In both cases of citizen and stateless, the recognition of multiple identities is necessary to dispel the hegemony derived from the identity crisis that happens when singular identity is emphasized, and other identities are suppressed or excluded. As a result, majoritarian domination over minorities becomes politically useful and so-called minorities are often forced to be merged with the identity of the majority concealing their own identity. As an alternative to multiculturalism, this theory has an inner appeal to be adopted as a state policy that will recognize the geographic and cultural rights of the displaced or diasporic people and uphold the individual rights on principle of selfhood over majority-minority concern. It will ensure the right of individuals to live in a place or state where they born, displaced or migrate and to exercise cultural practices retaining their own identity. One should not be bothered or deprived of that right due to having their own identity that is incompatible with that of the majority. If it is applied to the state policy, then the right of individuals would be protected from the hegemony of the majoritarianism of any kind. The theorist makes immense contribution in contemporary debate of political philosophy providing the theoretical solution to the long-standing problem of the state to ensure the rights of the immigrants, displaced, stateless and so-called minority people living in a plural society.

With this theoretical lens the Partition of 1947 can be revisited. In those three films, the post-partition complexities in the lives of the millions of the people have been represented focusing on the traumatizing memory of being displaced and living stateless without having identity and citizenship in a state. Those who have citizenship without the recognition of their language and culture are to face the problem in taking education and jobs. The irony of the political identity within the state has been shown to understand the faulty ground of the Partition that is unjustified and ethically questionable. Beyond this, the borderline with high cyclone wire fence known as barbed wire appears as the permanent horror that frequently commits fierce border killing at the India-Bangladesh border. This border divided the psyche of the of the people of the region and the politics of communal ideologies were planted. In this sub-continent, whether politics sustain, or humanity is a crucial question to the civilized world. Finally, the films keep the question: Is the hope for reunion of this sub-continent by shedding off religious and communal disunity with a common South Asian consciousness possible? The answer may not be found so easily, but a philosophical and theoretical approach may be employed to review the post partition politics of the sub-continent. As contemporary political philosophy, geo-cultural identity might be an appealing approach to examine the issues presented in the films which have been causing suffering for many a million for decades.

Conclusion

The Partition as revisited in Tanvir Mokammel's films is an unfinished project. It has long standing ramifications for Bangladesh as well as for the whole region. These three films of Tanvir Mokammel on partition have much reflective appeal for politically conscious societies to ponder over the flaws on historical decisions that mercilessly dissociated people. Derivatives of such great mistaken incidents are the present reality that has been the part of the live and no other options to ignore it. Many issues are still life affecting and need to be solved with much sympathetic awareness. These issues are well addressed in Mokammel's *Chitra Nadir Pare*, *Swapnabhumi* and *Semantorekha* from a humanitarian perspective and there is an urge for reconsidering the past mistakes with present wisdom. Thus, scholars, academicians and politicians are supposed to be concerned to concentrate on those vital points. The philosophical perspective grounded on the issues of these films are analyzed by applying a theory of political philosophy named geo-cultural identity to seek a theoretical solution of the problems. There are many aspects of these films as open ended for researchers, activists and humanitarian workers to work on.

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